5-4-19 Share the Good News Rev. Amy Haines

Acts 10:34-43

For the past two weeks, we have reflected on the story of that first Easter day. The women encountering angels and the wonder of an empty tomb. The men unsure of the women’s words, until Jesus appeared in their midst. For the past two weeks, we have declared the good news of that first Easter day. The tomb is empty! Death has been defeated! Jesus is risen, just as he said!

Yet now as we continue on in the season of Easter, what do we do with such good news? How does the message of the cross and the empty tomb make a difference in our lives today?

After that first Easter day, the disciples also had to decide what to do with the good news of Easter. Do they dismiss it, or do they allow it to transform their lives? Thankfully for us, the disciples chose to allow the good news of a crucified and risen Lord and Savior to transform their lives.

The early church’s story is captured in the Book of Acts, a continuation of the story of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Acts proclaims the witness of the early church in word and deed. As the disciples believed in the good news of Jesus as Lord of all, their lives were transformed to witness to what they believed. As Jesus had healed, so they healed. As Jesus had taught, so they taught. As Jesus had lived with compassion, so they lived with compassion. As Jesus had prayed, so they prayed. The deeper they sought to understand the kingdom of God the greater they sought to live by God’s kingdom ways. Transformed by the resurrection, they witnessed to the resurrection. The disciples of Jesus were the first to declare that Easter is not simply a remembrance of a story from long ago, but the beginning of a new life for here and now and for all eternity.

Consider the transformation God brought about in one disciple named Peter. An ordinary fisherman called to follow Jesus, Peter was known to be impulsive and passionate. He would often speak first and think later.

On the night of Jesus’ betrayal, when Jesus told his disciples that all of them would desert him,

Peter emphatically brushed off such a claim, stating that he would rather die for Jesus. Then hours later, Peter not only denied Jesus once, he denied Jesus three times, claiming with an oath that he truly did not know the man. Then the cock crowed, and Peter cried. On Easter morning Peter yearned for the story of the women to be true. Only when Jesus finally appeared to his disciples did Peter begin to hope again and to believe.

Following Jesus’ ascension and the mighty coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter became a changed man, a bold man, a man not afraid to tell the story of Jesus.

By the time of our Scripture reading today in Acts chapter 10, Peter is the leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem. Until now he had been proclaiming the good news of Jesus to the Jews.

Yet in Acts 10 God expands Peter’s vision, that the good news of Jesus is not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. In Acts 10 God expands the ministry of the early church to share the good news with all God’s beloved children, no matter who they were or where they came from.

This is a radical shift that only God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, could accomplish.

Yet, it is also a shift that the author of Luke-Acts highlights at Jesus’ birth, with the arrival of the magi. This is a shift that is shown time and again throughout the Gospel when Jesus honors women, heals outcasts, and calls ordinary men and women to follow him.

Here in Acts 10, we are introduced to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, one of the despised oppressors of Israel, yet Scripture also describes him as a devout, God-fearing, generous man.

One day, while at his residence in Caesarea, Cornelius had a vision, to send for Simon Peter who was currently proclaiming Christ crucified and risen in Joppa. The next day, in Joppa, Peter had a vision to eat food considered unclean by the Jews. Then he heard the voice of God tell him that “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” Immediately following that vision, Peter was invited to Cornelius’ house, and obediently he followed where God called him, even into the home of a despised Gentile Roman soldier.

Our passage today is Peter’s witness to Cornelius and his household, the first sermon, so to speak, given to the Gentiles concerning Jesus. Following Peter’s sermon, the Holy Spirit was poured out in that place, and the gospel was forever expanded beyond the Jews to the Gentiles.

When Jesus commissioned his disciples at his ascension, between Easter and Pentecost, Acts 1 records that Jesus declared that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, In Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now here in Acts 10, that expansion of the good news begins to ripple out to the Gentiles, then later explodes throughout the Roman Empire through the ministry of Paul. Thankfully, those ripples of good news have continued down from generation to generation, and the good news that Peter and the early church proclaimed long ago has been passed down to us here today.

Now it is our turn to claim the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection, to claim the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of new life. Now it is our turn to share the good news that we claim, in word and deed, in faith and action.

The ways we share such good news will be as diverse as we are here today. Some of us are more vocal than others. Some of us enjoy helping more than speaking. Some of us proclaim our faith through music, and some of us proclaim our faith through compassion. No matter what we say or how we live, we are all called to share the good news of Jesus in word and action.

..Peter shared the story of the risen Christ by preaching. Paul shared it through the written word. Mother Teresa shared it through caring for the poor. St. Augustine said, “preach the gospel always; when necessary, use words.” How are you called to share the good news of the risen Christ?

-Annie Lockhart-Gilroy, 4-21-19 umcdiscipleship.org

Once there was a family who experienced the good news of Jesus through an unknown pizza delivery man. ..The family was standing on the sidewalk in front of their home, watching firemen swarming in and out of the house. A grease fire had severely damaged the kitchen, and smoke was now infiltrating everything else they owned.

Suddenly a pizza delivery car pulled up next to them at the curb, and a young man hopped out, bearing a large pizza. The father of the family looked annoyed and said, "I'm afraid you've got the wrong address -- obviously none of us ordered a pizza. Besides," he added ruefully, "my wallet was in my jacket ... in the kitchen." The pizza guy smiled, and shaking his head, said, "Oh I know you didn't order this, but I saw you all standing here, and I had to do something. There's no charge. Just try to take it easy and have something to eat." Astonished, the family watched as the delivery man quickly returned to his car and sped off.

--as told by Dennis McCarthy in The Loyalty Link,

“Church Behaving Badly” 4-12-98 homileticsonline.com

I read a story last week about a group of children who attended worship not because their parents brought them, but because of the invitation of a grandmotherly neighbor. The parents trusted their neighbor enough to allow her to take their children to church.

Maybe you share the good news of Jesus by intentionally offering a handshake and welcome to everyone who crosses your path, no matter if they are the president of a company or the delivery boy, a classmate you have known all your life or a new neighbor who struggles with English.

Maybe you share the good news of Jesus by lending a helping hand to others, in person or monetarily as through our Easter meals.

Sharing the good news of Jesus can happen through an invitation to worship, to study, to service alongside us. Sharing the good news of Jesus can happen through a listening ear, or through checking up on one another throughout the week instead of waiting until a Sunday morning to ask, “How are you?”

Sharing the good news of Jesus can happen when we humbly tell our stories of what a difference Jesus has made in our lives. Most of us are not going to be like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who knock on the doors of strangers to ask them about faith. Rather, most of us will tell our stories of faith in casual conversation with friends and family and those who trust our word to be true.

Yet, there will be times in our lives in which God invites us to be bold. To confidently claim and share the good news of Jesus and what a difference that good news has made in our lives.

In San Antonio Texas there once lived a wonderful Christian woman by the name of Edith Burns.

Edith Burns had a habit of introducing herself in this way: "Hello, my name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?" Then she would explain the meaning of Easter, and many times people would be saved.

This happened in her doctor’s office, with the head nurse, Beverly. Beverly had first met Edith when she was taking her blood pressure. Edith began by saying, "My name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?" Beverly said, "Why yes I do." Edith said, "Well, what do you believe about Easter?" Beverly said, "Well, it’s all about egg hunts, going to church, and dressing up."

Edith kept pressing her about the real meaning of Easter, and finally led her to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

One day as Edith waited on her gentle doctor, Will Phillips, to call her name, she sat in his waiting room with her big black Bible in her lap earnestly talking to a young mother sitting beside her. Dr. Phillips told Beverly, "Beverly, don’t call Edith into the office quite yet. I believe there is another delivery taking place in the waiting room.”

Later, when Edith sat down in the doctor’s office, she took one look at the doctor and said,

"Dr. Will, why are you so sad? Are you reading your Bible? Are you praying?" Dr. Phillips said gently, "Edith, I’m the doctor and you’re the patient."

With a heavy heart he said, "Your lab report came back and it says you have cancer, and Edith, you’re not going to live very long." Edith said, "Why Will Phillips, shame on you. Why are you so sad? Do you think God makes mistakes? You have just told me I’m going to see my precious Lord Jesus, my husband, and my friends. You have just told me that I am going to celebrate Easter forever, and here you are having difficulty giving me my ticket!” Dr. Phillips thought to himself, "What a magnificent woman this Edith Burns is!"

Edith continued coming to Dr. Phillips until the one new year when she did not show up at the doctor’s office but instead called and said she would have to be moving her story to the hospital. She told the good doctor, "Will, I’m very near home, so would you make sure that they put women in here next to me in my room who need to know about Easter."

Well, they did just that and women began to come in and share that room with Edith. Many women were saved. Everybody on that floor from staff to patients were so excited about Edith, that they started calling her Edith Easter; that is everyone except Phyllis Cross, the head nurse.

Phyllis made it plain that she wanted nothing to do with Edith because she "was a religious nut." Phyllis had been a nurse in an army hospital. She had seen it all and heard it all. She was the original G.I. Jane. She had been married three times, she was hard, cold, and did everything by the book.

One morning the two nurses who were to attend to Edith were sick. Edith had the flu and Phyllis Cross had to go in and give her a shot. When she walked in, Edith had a big smile on her face and said, "Phyllis, God loves you and I love you, and I have been praying for you."

Phyllis Cross said, "Well, you can quit praying for me, it won’t work. I’m not interested."

Edith said, "Well, I will pray and I have asked God not to let me go home until you come into the family." Phyllis Cross said, "Then you will never die because that will never happen," and curtly walked out of the room.

Every day Phyllis Cross would walk into the room and Edith would say, "God loves you Phyllis and I love you, and I’m praying for you."

One day Phyllis Cross said she was literally drawn to Edith’s room like a magnet would draw iron. She sat down on the bed and Edith said, "I’m so glad you have come, because God told me that today is your special day.” Phyllis Cross said, "Edith, you have asked everybody here the question, ’Do you believe in Easter?’ but you have never asked me." Edith said, "Phyllis, I wanted to many times, but God told me to wait until you asked, and now you have asked."

Edith Burns took her Bible and shared with Phyllis Cross the Easter Story of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Edith said, "Phyllis, do you believe in Easter? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is alive and that He wants to live in your heart?" Phyllis Cross said, "Oh I want to believe that with all of my heart, and I do want Jesus in my life." Right there, Phyllis Cross prayed and invited Jesus Christ into her heart. For the first time Phyllis Cross did not walk out of a hospital room, she was carried out on the wings of angels.

Two days later, Phyllis Cross came in and Edith said, "Do you know what day it is?"

Phyllis Cross said, "Why Edith, it’s Good Friday."

Edith said, "Oh, no, for you every day is Easter. Happy Easter Phyllis!"

Two days later, on Easter Sunday, Phyllis Cross came into work, did some of her duties and then went down to the flower shop and got some Easter lilies because she wanted to go up to see Edith and give her some Easter lilies and wish her a Happy Easter.

When she walked into Edith’s room, Edith was in bed. That big black Bible was on her lap. Her hands were in that Bible. There was a sweet smile on her face. When Phyllis Cross went to pick up Edith’s hand, she realized Edith was dead.

Her left hand was on John 14:2-3, "In my Father’s house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

Her right hand was on Revelation 21:4, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there shall be no more death nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Phyllis Cross took one look at that dead body, and then lifted her face toward heaven, and with tears streaming down her cheeks, said, "Happy Easter, Edith - Happy Easter!"

Phyllis Cross left Edith’s body, walked out of the room, and over to a table where two student nurses were sitting. She said, "My name is Phyllis Cross. Do you believe in Easter?"

--Michael McCartney sermoncentral.com 3-02, adapted

The good news that we have proclaimed these past two weeks, the good news of Easter, is still good news for us today. The tomb is empty. Death has been defeated. Jesus is alive. We are forgiven our sins, and offered the hope and promise of new life here and now as well as eternal life forever with Jesus.

Today we are called to believe in such good news. Today we are also called to share such good news.

How do you share, in word and action, the good news of a God who loves us, a Savior who died for us, and a Spirit who empowers us? How do you share, in word and action, that the good news of Easter is for all God’s beloved? How do you share, in word and action, what a difference the cross and empty tomb has made in your life?

We are all called to share the story of Jesus. We are also all called to share how that story has impacted our lives.

May the Spirit guide us as we live and love and share with others.

May it be so. Let us pray.